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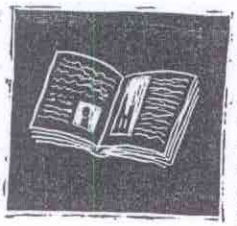
JFK Conspiracy Book Bites The Dust

By David L. Ulin

IT HAS BEEN TWENTY-SIX YEARS since John F. Kennedy was cut down by sniper fire in Dallas, but those six seconds have never stopped reverberating in our national psyche. Just take a look at the assassination books that arrive each November with the regularity of Thanksgiving turkeys being taken down to the killing floor. This year brings Jim Marrs's *Crossfire*, a hefty compendium of eyewitness accounts and researchers' theories. Marrs, a Texas journalist who teaches the only college-level assassination course in the country (theory, not how-to), offers what he calls a comprehensive overview, including, of course, his own particular slant on what happened that day, one that—surprise, surprise—deviates completely from the official line.



Crossfire: The Plot That Killed Kennedy
by Jim Marrs
595 pp.,
Carroll & Graf,
New York, 1989

Now don't get me wrong: I'm not putting the critics down. To believe the Warren Report, after all, you'd have to accept that Lee Harvey Oswald was just a crazy Commie who acted alone, a mediocre marksman who wanted nothing more than to blast himself onto history's front page with a semiautomatic rifle and a cryptic half-grin, and who, in the process, pulled off the precision shoot of the century. But while critics have, over the years, pulled together an enormous amount of important and original research—often uncovering documentary evidence the U.S. government, with all of its resources, never did—at this late date, most of the major discoveries have long ago been made, and assassination literature is getting harder and harder to justify.

Actually, this issue is one that *Crossfire* attempts to address. One reason for an encyclopedic approach, Marrs explains, is the sheer volume of material the Kennedy assassination has generated. He calls his work "a distillation of the numerous books, articles, and documentaries that have been produced over the years."

But in so unresolved a case, this route can have real problems, a point Marrs unwittingly proves again and again. For while he seems to want to be objective—he doggedly catalogs names, places, and events in a flat and impersonal voice—Marrs undercuts his efforts by failing to offer either footnotes or an index, and by including a photo section that is largely irrelevant to much of his material. An overview, after all, must primarily be connective, and the exclusion of all this essential information casts us into a kind of factual no man's land, with no external context in which to ground Marrs's assertions and observations.

Then, of course, there's the nasty problem of conclusions, of all the facts and theories being manipulated to serve a specific end—a circumstance that blasts through *Crossfire*'s veneer of objectivity as surely as any assassin's bullet. Marrs subscribes to what I call the "Palace Coup" theory: That, from the Mob to Hoover to LBJ himself, people at the highest levels of power collaborated either implicitly or explicitly in a Machiavellian plot that was held to be in their mutual interests. It's a nice theory —appropriate, even—in light of the persistent romance of the Camelot myth. But it's also unrealistic, for it ignores the first rule of every successful conspiracy—keep it tight.

MEANWHILE, CRITICS CONTINUE to posit increas-

ingly labyrinthine conspiracies, while the men who killed John Kennedy remain unexposed, part of a shadowy network of deceit that keeps fading in and out of focus like old film. In fact, it sometimes seems that books like this only help their cause. For, all else aside, it is likely that whatever conspiracy was in effect in Dallas developed from contacts first made during the Bay of Pigs between U.S. intelligence operatives, the Mob, and the Cuban refugee community, contacts later exploited from Watergate to Iran-Contra and beyond. Although Jim Marrs clears some of the static from around these connections, he never sees the assassination as anything more than an isolated incident. Want to know who killed JFK? Well, you'll have to wait for next year's turkey, because this one isn't giving anything away. **RR▲**